Outlook

draft notes

From Christy Agner <cagner@email.wcu.edu>
Date Wed 1/14/2026 11:23 AM
To Kelly Tornow <ktornow@email.wcu.edu>

2 attachments (4 MB)
Minority_20Plan_20Supporting_20Materials.pdf.pdf; Jackson County Majority voting plan and site review.pdf;

Here are the notes I have thus far. I focused on statements I heard that appear to be factually incorrect, as well as statements made in the presentations that relate to campus accessibility and compliance with BOE voting site rules and needs. I also included statements that referred to WCU as an Institution.

Please make any edits/additions/deletions that would be beneficial to the retention of this information. I share these notes, as/if needed, with EC and Comms.

Western Carolina University

Christy Agner

Deputy Chief of Staff & External Relations Director

Office of the Chancellor
Western Carolina University | 530 H.F. Robinson
1 University Drive, Cullowhee, NC 28723
o: (828) 227.3553 | c: 919-696-8738 cagner@wcu.edu

Factual inaccuracies stated at this meeting by presenters

1. 'I got tired of being towed and ticketed' WCU parking enforcement does not tow vehicles
2. 'Past site at WCU, the parking is zero. Maybe 2 spots' : WCU has provided the requested number of curb-side and voter parking spots that the BOE requested. One request, the BOE responded they have no documented complaints about parking or access at BOE. WCU showed the chair and staff the multiple spots that have been reserved in past elections. It is the requested 2 curb-side spots and then additional voter parking spots, which are indicated by signage at the site and directional signs from the entrance of campus.
3. 'WCU employs 3000 faculty and staff' : The WCU employee count is estimated at 1600.
4. '60% of students do not have vehicles.' WCU has shared that 60% of students that live on campus do not have a vehicle

Subjective items of concern stated at the meeting / in submitted materials

5. WCU HHS is 1.7 miles from both the Hinds Center and Ramsey Center
1. Plus the past WCU voting site is not reasonably accessible to the general public. The Hinds Center is fully ADA compliant, including adjacent and ADA parking.

Excerpts from comments made by Bill Thompson (Jackson BOE chair, WCU alum, WCU parent). presented the "Majority Plan'
Irresponsible to taxpayers to operate two sites [within close proximity'
WCU is willing to continue offering this site
Full stop, WCU's current location is not accessible to most voters. We are not going to have two Cullowhee sites, and we are going to have the same site for primary and general
Parking – it's a long way, a lot of steps, great distance, electioneering not good (2 entrances), parking lot always full, hard to get to most of the time
The current WCU location is not accessible; I had to park/walk for about an hour to get there
Students – if talking about students, they are not kindergarteners. They are adults. College students are able to get themselves .6 of a mile

Jackson Transit will transport up to 24 students at a time
Past site – the parking is zero. Maybe 2 spots. I park elsewhere because I am tired of being towed and ticketed
Hinds is 'out of the question.'
In response to BOE member Rucho's question 'Is the site unwelcoming?' Bill said 'he gets tickets, we don't reserve parking, maybe 2 spots only are provided.

E**xcerpts from comments made by Betsy Swift,** presented the "Minority Plan'
WCU employs 3000 faculty and staff, 10K people on campus on any given day
HHS has an elevator, ramp, stairs, and ample parking
The Rec Center is 1.7 miles from campus, no public transportation to this site. Off a busy, 4-lane road, no sidewalks, no shoulder
60% of students do not have a vehicle
The area has no Uber or taxis
Jackson Transit use would have to be approved by the county
The majority's claims on parking and accessibility of the HHS site are misrepresented
20-30 parking spaces have been offered
No documented complaints about parking or accessibility of the current site
WCU's letter details a generous contribution to support the voting site.
Object to Chairs characterization of the parking situation at HHS; the stairs comments are irrelevant

Comments from Election's Director (requested from SBOE member)
Elections can occur everywhere. At P&R site, the size concerns of the available room will create a different experience for workers and voters due to expected lines.
Cullowhee is the largest precinct. Congestion at a consolidated site is expected

Outcome: State Board of Elections acted on Jackson County's early voting location plan for the 2026 primary. On a split vote, the Board adopted Jackson County Board majority's proposed plan, which eliminates the WCU Hinds Center as an early vote site for the 2026 primary. 2026 would have been the 10th anniversary of the voting site at the Hinds student center.

> Carolina Public Press [Excerpt *In Jackson County, the local election board's Republican majority decided that having two voting sites within 2 miles of each other was redundant. So, they removed a longstanding site on Western Carolina University's campus that has been proven to boost youth voter turnout. State board member Millen questioned why Jackson County would go down from 5 to 4 sites when its population is growing. Jackson County Republican Chair Bill Thompson said the WCU campus was inconvenient because of a difficult parking situation. On the other hand, Democratic board member Betsy Swift said even though the closest voting site to campus is not far, the road to get there is a dangerous highway without sidewalks. Many freshmen and sophomores do not have cars, and the college transportation system does not go to the nearby voting site Recent WCU graduate Taylor Bucklin teared up after the vote when talking about student voting access. While she was a student, Bucklin did substantial work, both nonpartisan and partisan, to increase voter*

turnout. Bucklin said it was frustrating to watch people who don't know Jackson County or WCU tell them what was best for them.

"It's like that Washington Post quote: democracy dies in darkness." she said. "Democracy dies when people don't care and it's not available to them." The state board members voted along party lines to remove the WCU site.

Smoky Mountain News Excerpt: *The majority also argued that the existing WCU Health and Human Sciences Building, proposed by minority members as an alternative campus-adjacent site, presents accessibility challenges due to walking distances, stairs and internal navigation. Minority members disputed those claims and argued that the cost savings cited by the majority are overstated. Their analysis, based on staffing requirements and the high volume of same-day registrations typically handled at the campus site, estimates savings closer to $6,000 rather than $20,000. They also note that both the parks and recreation facility and WCU have offered suitable voting spaces at no cost to the county. A central point of disagreement concerns transportation and pedestrian access. Minority members contend that the parks and recreation facility is approximately 1.7 miles from the center of campus, lacks public or university-provided transportation and is effectively inaccessible on foot due to the design of U.S. 107, a busy four-lane highway with no sidewalks and narrow shoulders. They estimate that walking from campus to the Parks and Recreation site takes roughly 40 minutes one way and note that approximately 68% of WCU students do not have personal vehicles.*

According to materials submitted to the state board, the HHS building offers reserved voter parking within 200 feet of the entrance, curbside voting access, ADA compliance, secure space dedicated to elections and familiarity to the broader community, having hosted public clinics and COVID-19 vaccination events serving thousands of county residents.

News and Observer [Excerpt: *The State Board of Elections also voted against including Sunday voting in six counties that had disagreed on the issue and cut a longtime early voting site at Western Carolina University…In total, Republicans on the State Board of Elections rejected plans to include early voting sites at four different universities: UNCG, NC A&T, WCU and Elon University. All of those sites have been used at some point in the recent past, but WCU's is the only site that had been used in the most recent comparable election, which was the 2022 primary…."If the WCU site is eliminated, youth voter turnout would decline," Betsy Swift, a Democratic member of the Jackson County Board of Elections, said. "Fewer young voters would establish lifelong voting habits. Voters would shift to other sites, increasing congestion, same day registration workload and staffing burdens." Jackson County Board Chair Bill Thompson, a Republican, said students should be able to navigate the changes. "I would remind everyone that we when we talk about students, we're not talking about kindergarteners who need help tying their shoes and opening their milk cartons," he said. "We're talking about adults who are seeking their postsecondary education. These adults have demonstrated above-average ability and mobility."*